

BACKGROUND

As of May 2005 there were about 1.7 million women veterans in the United States and Puerto Rico, accounting for some seven percent of the U.S. veteran population. Women currently make up 15 percent of the active-duty force and 23 percent of the reserve force; it is projected that by 2010 they will account for 10 percent of the veteran population. In addition to offering comprehensive women's healthcare, VA supports medical and psychosocial research aimed at improving the lives of women veterans.

WHAT VA IS DOING

Many VA studies focus on health issues that are of special or unique concern to women veterans. Examples include post-traumatic stress disorder in women, depression in women, breast cancer, lupus and osteoporosis.

Highlights of current or recent research include the following:

- **Cancer screening in frail elderly women**—Researchers with VA and the University of California, San Francisco, found that elderly women in very poor health for whom the risks of Pap smears and mammograms outweigh the potential benefits are being screened at rates equal to those of healthier women. The researchers said that for women with a life expectancy of less than five years, these screenings could result in the detection and treatment of disease that is not clinically significant, and cause unnecessary distress for patients and their families.

- **Study offers insight into lupus risk**—A team led by an Oklahoma VA physician discovered that in patients with systemic lupus erythematosus, autoantibodies (proteins the body mistakenly unleashes against its own tissue) are typically present years before symptoms develop. The findings may guide efforts to develop preventive and early-stage therapies for lupus. The disease affects an estimated 1.4 million Americans, mostly women.

For more information on VA research:

Web: www.va.gov/resdev

Tel: (410) 962-1800, ext. 223

